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Address of Governor Olson.
September 30, 1939.



ADDRESS OF GOVERNOR OLSON

BEFORE THE

STATE RELIEF COMMISSION - September 30, 1939

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MR. YOUNG: We have the honor and privilege this morning of having his Excellency, the Governor of the State of California, with us. That is a great honor and one that we greatly appreciate, and, Governor, we will be glad to hear anything that you wish to present to us at this time, or anything that we can do in any way to facilitate the things that you have in mind. If you will present them to us we will be glad to take them up.

GOVERNOR OLSON: Thank you, Mr. Young. In the first place, let me say that I have for some time wanted to attend a meeting of the Commission and have a little closer touch with the business of your meetings from time to time and consult with you on matters of administration particularly, and social welfare, of course, and this is the first opportunity given me to come down and meet with you.

What I particularly wanted to be here for this morning is subject number six on your agenda. Yesterday morning I received the report of the Governor's Committee on Re-employment and yesterday I spent studying the completed report. Heretofore -- of course, you know -- a section of the report having to do with the production policy in relief had been received, and I might say in connection with the release of that section of the report before it was delivered I have felt that I probably owed the Commission an explanation. I was in Los Angeles when I received it and, whether I was justified in doing so or not, I had assumed at least that the report was in the hands of all the members of the Commission and, in fact, that the conclusions and recommendations contained in it were familiar to the Commission, and, while I knew formal action had not been taken, I believed that it was generally approved so that in the release of it to the press, which seemed premature, I probably didn't realize that it probably would have been better had I waited formal study and action by the Commission.

Now, in the completed report, therefore, before any release, I wanted to come down and be present at its presentation and I believe copies have now been furnished to all the members of the Commission.

MR. CHAMBERS: We have a single copy, Governor -- a single copy and I have a copy. I might say that we are having the State Printer print copies of it for general use and study.

GOVERNOR OLSON: I want to say this with reference to this report and recommendations contained in it, that to me it seems the soundest, most practical approach to our most serious problem of government, most serious social and economic problem that I, at least, have seen at any time. It follows out with practical plan and recommendations --y own ideas and policies with reference to that problem. It has not only studied and recommended what should be directly done in the matter of the expenditure of unemployment relief funds under a policy of employment rather than dole, but it surveys generally the whole State structure and what may well be the activities of other departments of the State in coordinating

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their efforts to accomplish the employment of those who employ those who are forced to idleness through no fault of their own.

Now, then I notice in the opening of this report the Commission recites the letter or statement I made to it when it was appointed, as follows:

"Nine long years of depression and business recovery have seen unemployment in California unabated. We now face unemployment as a permanent problem and look for a permanent solution. We cannot afford the extravagance of emergency measures. We cannot borrow money to keep our citizens on the dole at a sub-standard level of bare existence. Taxpayers will not be losers if we use tax money to experiment in self-maintenance of those who must be cared for by them now.

"To those who accuse us of building an economy within an economy, I say look at the institutions where the blind and the crippled are providing for themselves in part. Even mental cases are contributing to their own support. If this is true, why can't normal men be allowed to help to take care of themselves?

"I want you to make surveys of all the production facilities we could use which could contribute to normal human requirements; to see how we can get to the unemployed the surplus commodities of our farms; to find the best way to set up projects to produce the essentials of life for those in need.

"If there is any other way out, nobody has been able to point it. You must pioneer the way for a better balanced order of production and consumption values for the rest of the United States.

"The Commission is charged with the responsibility of analyzing the problem of re-employment from all angles - economic, social and fiscal. The problem is not isolated within a single department of State government.

"If we find that our conceptions are contrary to the facts, we will change the conception to fit the facts. I hope you will find courage to go where the facts lead you."

That was my statement to the Committee when it was appointed and I consider that they have done a wonderful job in their careful, studious approach accomplished in the production of this report which will guide us in the policy of unemployment relief and in the coordination and policies in other departments of government to accomplish re-employment. I believe that the members of this Commission needed this report. Every one of you will agree to that. I believe it is a historic document. I think it not only will take its place in the historic progress of our State, but nationally. I believe it presents the competent work and direction for us to follow for charting our course in California; that, if we follow with sincerity of purpose, with competency and efficiency and determination, we will pioneer the way for the rest of the states. I feel almost like saying that I know we can succeed, but, like every other effort in the working of our democracy, we need cooperation to succeed. We need understanding; we have to combat ignorance, prejudices, cross-currents, political pressure that is not altogether altruistic and too often selfish. But I feel that this report and the policy we enter on now in the matter of tackling the unemployment problem makes the work of this Commission more important than ever before and needs the close attention, study and helpful direction of this Commission and that direction, of course, needs technical ability, qualified direction and scientific approach in the practical carrying out of the program embraced in the report. I want to say to you gentlemen and ladies that I heartily approve this report, all of it. The purposes, objectives and plans which it presents for meeting the

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unemployment problem are really closer and they really concern me more than any other problem of the various problems and complexities of my administration. I am hoping that you all, after studying this report, will see fit to give your approval to it and to have your continued cooperation and your faith in my administration and at least my intentions.

Now, there is only one other thing I would wish to add. I know in the changed administration some changes have occurred in relief personnel. There have been changes of some who have been connected with it and some have expressed criticism that some changes have been made and have been alarmed for fear our State Relief Administration will break down through political pressure and that we will yield to the reward of political services by placing incompetents in the direction and technical work of that administration. I want to say to you that that may disturb some for awhile. It doesn't disturb me at all, because it is not going to occur -- inefficiency is not going to occur and no matter what the political position of anyone is, no one who isn't efficient and loyal and determined to maintain the highest possible standards in every piece of work or study that he or she is to perform in the administration of SRA, will last there at all. I do feel that, having the responsibility which is given me, I want to know there is loyalty to our objectives and loyalty to the administration and no indifference to it. I have stated that before and I think it would be supineness and ignorance on my part if I didn't make sure of that loyalty. I do not want to disturb any efficient person who has given his or her time and service in the SRA, qualified to do it, at all, but I do feel that, in the direction and key positions determining the policies and the administrative practices that I think should be laid down as well, shall be in hands that I trust. I hope you won't blame me for looking at that that way.

Now, in this report, if there is a recommendation that ultimately the SRA, as well as all other departments of State government, considering it is a permanent institution, should be brought under the civil service, I agree with that. I believe that it should be ultimately. We know that the civil service merit system is progressive and should be extended instead of undermined. Now, we all know that it can be abused, and when it is abused it is probably more obstructive than constructive and helpful. It has been abused in other departments. I hope that during my administration it will not only not be abused, but that we can have civil service within standard practices and purposes of the law in letter and spirit actually carried out and not attempt to circumvent for political consideration. Now, that may seem somewhat different than your ideas may have been with regard to some of the actions taken. I can say to you that, in order to get that spirit -- and that kind of politics, if you please -- into State government, instead of mere patronage and corrupt politics, we have got to do some weeding out. Even in the civil service there have been circumventions in order to place people who were unfit in office. There are people in departments now in the civil service wholly unfit, whom I do not believe could pass a fair examination, and who have been put in there purely for political reasons. They have been assigned to work and classifications where they have never done any work. I just wanted to bring that question up and try if I can, to disabuse, as far as possible, any misgivings you may have along that line. I feel it is in justice to you to say that, and in justice to everyone who in good faith wants to see the highest possible standards in SRA administration, as well as other departments of the State, and that we shall not be given to disregard the merit system and have more political patronage in performance of the trust and spending of the money, seeing that it reaches the purposes for which SRA is established.

I think that is all I have to say, and thank you for listening to me thus far. I believe you have your agenda here and, unless there are any questions which you desire to ask me, or matters to bring up while I am here, I won't remain throughout the meeting.

MR. YOUNG: Thank you, Governor, and I am sure the Commission greatly appreciates the assurances along the lines of the merit system and that they have full confidence in your sincerity in carrying that out. This Commission wishes to further as much as possible the ideals of the administration and to carry out what is, I both in theory and practice, the best thing for the State and the people, as I am sure you do as well, and, in view of that, I am sure, as soon as they receive this matter which has been presented in full -- as soon as the copies are available and this commission has a chance to give study to it -- while they have had, as you know a conference with Mr. Richards in advance, prior to the rendering of the report, they will give the minute details of the report their study and the very best thought that they have, and I am sure that the whole Commission agrees with the principle heretofore announced in the study that was made by Mr. Richards' committee and that they will do everything in their power to see that it is successfully carried out. Now, in order to do that, I would suggest, unless something else occurs, that this Commission, either at a special meeting for that purpose or at a regular meeting, invite Mr. Richards' committee to meet with us and discuss this subject. They have made a study of some seven odd months of it; they are familiar with every detail of the study they have made; and it would be helpful and I think of general assistance all around if we could have a joint meeting with them and with your permission we will invite them to a joint meeting at which we might discuss it.

GOVERNOR OLSON: I think that is a good suggestion.

MR. YOUNG: And at the earliest possible moment this Commission can take action and digest this report they will be pleased to do so. I further assure you of the wish and desire of this Commission to be helpful and of assistance in carrying out the main ideas of the State in giving relief to its unfortunate people, in cooperating with other departments of the State, and in doing, insofar as they are able, the very best job they can in carrying matters through to a successful conclusion. We appreciate very much your coming down to meet with us, and, if you will stay with us for such time as you can spare us and then feel perfectly free to leave.

